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**Regional Transportation and Environment Pilot Projects:**
**Purpose, Selection Criteria and Timeline**

***Introduction***

The Regional Administrators and senior headquarters management have endorsed regional TEA-21 pilots as a mechanism to implement the agency strategy of new approaches to integrating transportation and environmental policy. The cross-program transportation teams1 should work directly in partnership with State and local transportation officials in one or two pilot areas to develop and implement innovative transportation plans. The teams should form partnerships with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), State Departments of Transportation (State DOTs), and community groups to facilitate earlier involvement in regional planning processes. Activities may include:

- Helping to develop and evaluate innovative alternatives which both enhance mobility and reduce the need for costly new infrastructure by improving the efficiency our existing systems
- Assessing the cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed policies and investments contained in regional transportation plans
- Suggesting alternatives to improve the environmental performance of the proposed plans

***Goals and Structure of Pilots***

Each region should develop pilots that contain approaches and sets of activities appropriate to the unique context in each region. The existing relationships, opportunities for new partnerships with transportation agencies, limitations and special circumstances within each region will help shape the content and scope of the regional pilots. However, common principles and basic activities exist that can be used to develop pilots appropriate to each region's specific context.

***Pilot Activities***

A range of activities could provide the core elements of the regional pilots. The activities and goals should be focused around earlier and more comprehensive involvement in transportation planning. However, each region may choose to pursue partnerships with transportation agencies related to either regional planning, corridor and project level initiatives or a combination of activities. Potential activities can be described within the spectrum of transportation planning from long-range/region-wide/comprehensive to near-term/project-specific/focused on specific environmental considerations. Examples for consideration include:

*Long-term regional opportunities*

- Working with an MPO and/or State DOT on a Long-range Transportation Plan update
  - Considering broad environmental and social equity "performance measures" for transportation investments
  - Encouraging investment strategies within long-range plan that maximize benefits from targeted support for Brownfields and in-fill development, watershed and

wetlands protection, storm water management systems and open space preservation
- Consideration of broad policies that rely on road and parking price reform, broad implementation of commuter choice initiatives, improved land-use policies and increased transit investment
- Developing partnerships with local and regional land-use authorities to facilitate coordination between regional economic development, land-use and transportation strategies

*Near term regional (3-5 year) opportunities*
- Working with an MPO and/or State DOT on the development of Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) with activities and objectives similar to those listed above, but with a near-term focus.

*Corridor level opportunities*
- Developing solutions to specific problems in a regional corridor
  - Evaluating the effectiveness of alternatives to highway expansion including: investments to improve transit service and transit oriented development alternatives, including Brownfields.
  - Evaluating opportunities within a corridor to develop connected investments in mitigation of wetlands losses, watershed protection and storm water runoff treatment

*Project level opportunities*
- Innovative project design or redesign to avoid, minimize and mitigate environmental impacts
  - Flexible design standards or design changes to mitigate impacts
  - Mitigation investments (wetlands restoration, treatment of runoff)
  - Mitigation policies (Flexible pricing on new capacity with revenues used to increase quality of transit service, limited access points to new capacity)

***Long-term Regional vs. Innovative Project Level Opportunities***

Each region will most likely encounter tradeoffs when considering how to structure their pilot initiatives. Long-range planning processes offer the strongest potential to make lasting changes in transportation investment priorities and policies that encourage consideration of the trade-offs between compact and more dispersed development patterns, and increased options for accessing employment, quality housing, commercial activities and recreation opportunities. Such a strategy benefits environmental objectives by reducing both direct impacts of transportation and the indirect impacts of transportation through its influences on land development patterns. On the other hand, project level initiatives that avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental impacts can lead to tangible success within one to two years. Such success stories can also help build better relationships with transportation agencies and demonstrate the benefits of EPA's involvement in long-range regional planning.

***The Importance of Focusing on Regional Planning***

The regional long-range plans and transportation improvement program are of critical importance because they determine how hundreds of billions of dollars in federal and state transportation funding are actually spent. Innovative demand management alternatives such as: transit oriented development, "Smart Growth" investment policies, road pricing and other significant changes in transportation and land use policies all require regional scale implementation to effectively create viable transportation alternatives that reduce congestion and the pressure to build additional highway capacity.

***Developing Consensus***

Strategies to meet mobility needs and reduce traffic congestion while protecting the environment will require a broad consensus among community and business groups. Increased public involvement will be necessary to facilitate innovative transportation planning at a regional level. Community-based vision planning processes could be one mechanism for reaching such a consensus. These processes formulate options and collect feedback on transportation and land-use alternatives through schools, civic groups, media campaigns, focus groups, public opinion polling, use of Internet sites, etc. However, alternatives cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. Some analysis of alternatives will be needed to help move the process forward. The results of any analysis must effectively evaluate non-traditional alternatives and be easily understood by citizens and elected officials with varying degrees of technical knowledge of transportation and land-use policy.

EPA regions and headquarters must develop a coordinated package of tools, outreach strategies and other assistance to help MPOs evaluate innovative policies and build broad-based support for alternatives. The EPA regional programs currently working on transportation issues each bring unique perspectives and groups of stakeholders to the process.

***Other state and local stakeholders that could be involved in pilots***

State Departments of Transportation, State transit agencies
FHWA State Division Offices and FTA Regional Offices
State air, environment, natural resource, or planning agencies
Regional Governments (air quality districts, regional planning commissions)
Cities, Counties and Municipalities
Colleges or Universities
Community or Grassroots organizations (local chambers of commerce, community development corporations, locally based environmental organizations, faith-based organizations)

***Defining and Measuring Successful Pilots***

Although the success of regional pilots will be determined partially by their scope and activities, there are some outcomes that can serve as benchmarks for measuring success. Initial success in some areas may be defined as successful cooperation at a project level, which can open the door to more comprehensive involvement in regional transportation regional planning. In other areas, more ambitious measures of success might be defined in terms of stabilizing the growth of emissions per capita from mobile sources, improved regional transit accessibility,

increased pedestrian/bike friendliness within communities, or decreasing the rate at which farmland, open spaces, wetlands and other critical natural land resources are lost to urban development.

For **project level** initiatives success can be measured within a range of indicators. Outcome based measures such as changes in regional air or water quality or improvements in public health are often difficult to measure. Therefore, other "indicators" of success such as net increases in wetlands, reductions in untreated highway runoff, and increases in transit ridership associated with transit accessible Brownfields projects could be used as benchmarks.

In **long range planning** and transportation improvement programs, success should be measured both in terms of qualitative improvements to the process and quantifiable changes toward a more environmentally sustainable system. Increasing the responsiveness of the process to the broad range of community and environmental stakeholders is a fundamental benchmark for success. Additionally, quantitative measures of success could be defined. Changes in the growth in vehicle travel per person, protection sensitive land resources and the rate of conversion of rural lands to urban lands are examples of potentially useful benchmarks. The MPOs in Philadelphia, Denver and Portland have all developed initial sets of performance measures that might serve as useful models.

***Factors to consider in selection of pilots***

Existing relationship with MPO, local and State transportation officials

- Presence of well organized local stakeholder and community groups
- Timing of regional transportation plan development (e.g. just beginning revisions of 3-5 year Travel Improvement Program or 20 year Long Range Plan)
- Presence of other EPA resources and activities (e.g. Brownfields Showcase Community staff, Sustainable Development Challenge Grant recipients, local Clean Water Action Plan initiatives)
- Clean Air Act Attainment Status
- Administrative feasibility (Travel costs)

***Summary: Basic Principles of the Regional Pilots***

Considerable discussion on the shape and nature of the regional pilots took place at the November 1998 TEA-21 workshop in Chicago. The EPA regional and headquarters staff participating outlined several broad themes or basic principles with regard to the pilots:

**Catalyst** EPA should serve as a catalyst to encourage greater public participation in discussion of sustainable transportation policies through partnerships among FHWA, FTA, MPOs and community based organizations. EPA has relationships with local organizations that have an interest in transportation policy and are frequently the source of innovative ideas, but might not be seen as clients by transportation agencies. EPA can help the two sets of stakeholders meet and work together.

**Technical Assistance** EPA needs to offer a coordinated set of expertise and assistance to state and local transportation planners and organizations (e.g., detail best practices case studies, workshops, grants, analytical tools, assistance with policy modeling, expertise in understanding modeling issues and interpretation of results).

**Early Involvement** EPA should seek to prevent pollution through early consideration of land-use and demand management alternatives and early consideration of comprehensive impacts in transportation plan development. This means that EPA needs to get more involved where the transportation decisions are being made, starting with the regional planning process.

**Communicate Objectives** Environmental goals and legislative requirements should be clearly communicated up front. EPA should articulate what we are trying to achieve and work with local stakeholders to advance specific alternatives that meet regional accessibility needs.

**Leverage Transportation and Environmental Resources** Part of taking advantage of opportunities is identifying synergies between transportation and environmental policies and regulations, and leveraging environmental and transportation resources.

***Timeline***

Many regions have already initiated a process to define and launch regional TEA-21 pilots. The actions have included the formulation of cross-program teams, development of interim action plans and initial discussions with potential partners. It should also be noted that many regions have already been engaged in partnerships with local officials to approach transportation and the environment differently. Ideally, the regional pilots should build upon such efforts.

Although the scope and timing of each region's pilots will vary, moving ahead in a consistent fashion across regions will be facilitate the identification of resources to support the pilots, coordination with national partners and cross-fertilization between the pilots. Below is a ***suggested timeline*** for developing the elements of the regional pilots.

**January**

Identification of cross-program team members
Nomination of a steering committee to coordinate team activities
Identification and review of potential pilot locations

**February**

- Selection of regional pilot location
- Kick-off meeting with MPO partner and other local partners to begin formulating pilot activities
- e.g. public participation in regional transportation plan development or project/corridor evaluation, innovative policy analysis, education and outreach, research, development of

environmental performance standards for transportation plans
- Identification of research and outreach needs to support pilots

**March**
- Convene a meeting of local stakeholders
- Initiate research, education or outreach activities
- Begin formulation of FY 2000 appropriations and/or grant proposals to provide continued support for pilots